

Chapter 1: Introduction

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Photo credit: GBAJPB



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VISION

The Comprehensive Plan's purpose is to implement the Greater Bemidji Area's vision while providing general guidance for the public, future development, and neighborhood stability.

Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

This document contains the Comprehensive Plan for the Greater Bemidji Area. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan for the Greater Bemidji Area is to provide:

- An essential legal basis for land use regulation, such as zoning growth control; and
- A picture of the Greater Bemidji Area's future by presenting a unified vision as a result from goals and objectives from the Greater Bemidji Area's citizens.

The Comprehensive Plan establishes specific goals and policies to fulfill its vision and will be crucial as challenges related to economic vitality, accessible housing, community safety, and environmental preservation affect the future character of the Greater Bemidji Area.

Authority to Plan

The power to create and employ a comprehensive plan comes from State Law. Minnesota Statutes (MINN. STAT.), Sections 462.351 to 462.364, contain the planning powers granted to Minnesota cities. Specifically, MINN. STAT., Section 462.353, Subd. 1 authorizes the City to "carry on comprehensive municipal planning activities for guiding the future development and improvement of the municipality and may prepare, adopt and amend a comprehensive municipal plan and implement such plan by ordinance or other office measure."

The comprehensive plan is the foundation on which regulatory tools, such as zoning ordinances, subdivision regulations, and capital improvement programs are developed. Once in place, future development and redevelopment in a community should be evaluated on whether it is consistent with the comprehensive plan.

Use of the Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan presents a vision for the future of the Greater Bemidji Area and a clear direction for community action. It is based on locally established visions, goals, and policies derived through public participation. The individual chapters outline in more specific terms the goals and policies to ensure the Greater Bemidji Area grows in a way that:

- supports the values of the community, enhances economic vitality;
- promotes maintenance and enhancement of existing neighborhoods and commercial districts (including downtown Bemidji);
- provides affordable housing for all ages and groups; and
- determines and reinforces approaches for protecting natural resources and open spaces.

The Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a dynamic document used to:

- **Guide local officials and staff** to assist with development and infrastructure decisions, acquisition and use of land, budget capital improvements, and establish regulatory changes.
- **Guide residents, businesses, and property owners** to assist in determining property use, understanding possible land use changes in the Greater Bemidji Area, establish reasonable land value expectations, understand future infrastructure improvements, and make improvements and investments to their own properties.
- **Guide developers** in property acquisitions and coordination of development plans with the goals, policies, and regulations outlined in this Comprehensive Plan.

As the foremost guide for community growth and development within the Greater Bemidji Area, the Comprehensive Plan influences many other decisions. It is intended to be a dynamic document that is regularly reviewed and updated.

History of the Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Board (JPB)



The Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Board (JPB) evolved from a concerted effort of local leaders from the City of Bemidji and Northern Township. The JPB recognized that working together as a unified team was in the “greatest interest” of the community. The JPB was formed in 2007 and recently amended in 2017 to adopt a unified Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance for the entire 51-square-mile jurisdiction. This innovative approach to planning and zoning has created uniform development throughout the area. The JPB consists of three City of Bemidji City Council members and two Northern Township Board members. It strives to assist residents, business owners, and agencies in developing a community that supports appropriate growth.

Public Participation

The Greater Bemidji Area Comprehensive Plan was created through a public participation process. The process was designed to offer a range of opportunities for the Greater Bemidji Area community to provide input on issues, opportunities, and any concerns related to future planning. To that end, residents’ ideas, thoughts, and opinions are considered throughout the planning process and development of this plan.

Since the initial start of the Comprehensive Plan in 2012, public input from citizens, subcommittees, city and township staff, and elected officials has been an integral part of the planning process. Between 2012 and 2015, JPB staff moved forward on selected initial topics, or chapters, to be addressed through the development of, then incorporated into, the Comprehensive Plan. Topics were selected, in part, as a result of community discussions, comments from those community discussions, planning cases, a community survey, and a general understanding of the Greater Bemidji Area. The topics selected were identified as the key challenges facing the Greater Bemidji Area.

In August of 2016, a Steering Committee was appointed to disseminate what had been gathered previously, guide the planning process and Comprehensive Plan development moving forward, and make recommendations to the Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Commission (JPC) and JPB. The Steering Committee was comprised of representatives from the JPB, JPC, city officials, business owners, residents, and representatives from a variety of community interest and betterment groups.

Throughout the course of the Comprehensive Plan development, the Steering Committee reviewed and updated the Greater Bemidji Area's vision, created goals and policies, reviewed and recommended chapter content, and developed implementation action items.

The Steering Committee sought public engagement through open houses, and a public meeting in November of 2018. The Steering Committee reviewed past goals and policies from several public input meetings and sub-committee meetings to better understand issues related to the Comprehensive Plan and to create a document of objectives and strategies that can be used to guide future growth and development. These goals, objectives, and strategies were developed and refined to create this document.



Photo credit: GBAJPB

Organization of the Comprehensive Plan

The Plan has been organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** introduces the comprehensive planning process and acknowledgements of those instrumental to its development.
- **Chapter 2: Values, Vision, and Present Day** provides the core values, vision, and mission of the Greater Bemidji Area with a snapshot of present day conditions.
- **Chapter 3: Community Overview** provides a summary of the social, economic, and physical features that are influencing land use and community development patterns at the time the Comprehensive Plan was developed.
- **Chapter 4: Land Use** describes the Greater Bemidji Area's desires for future land use and development patterns. This chapter establishes objectives and strategies related to growth, land use, redevelopment, development trends, and economic growth/development.
- **Chapter 5: Downtown Bemidji** describes the heart of the city; a vibrant, pedestrian-oriented central district that defines the character and spirit of Bemidji. This chapter will evaluate the existing conditions and establish objectives and strategies that will continue to promote and enhance the downtown district.
- **Chapter 6: Economic Regional Center** breaks down the economic development and tourism that presides the Greater Bemidji Area. This chapter is the ultimate driving-force that allows the Greater Bemidji Area to excel.
- **Chapter 7: Community Facilities & Services** describes existing and future community needs to accommodate demand for new services. Community facilities consist of the structures, infrastructure, facilities, and services administered by the public and semi-public organizations that provide for the day-to-day functions of the Greater Bemidji Area.

- **Chapter 8: Housing** provides a summary of existing housing characteristics, promotes increased housing availability and affordability, promotes maintenance and enhancement of existing neighborhoods, and provides objectives and strategies for future development relative to needs and demand.
- **Chapter 9: Transportation** describes the current transportation network, including the trail system; evaluates current and future transportation needs; and provides objectives and strategies for attaining the Greater Bemidji Area's transportation vision.
- **Chapter 10: Active & Healthy Community** summarizes current park and recreation facilities and identifies objectives and strategies to expand and improve the system in the Greater Bemidji Area to provide a wide range of recreational activities for people of all ages and interests.
- **Chapter 11: Natural Resources** identify areas of high environmental and natural resource value. These features will often influence what kind of adjacent land use may occur and the intensity of any given use.
- **Chapter 12: Implementation** provides guidance and direction to ensure programs, objectives, and strategies addressed within the Comprehensive Plan are carried out by the decisions that the JPB and staff make daily.